
A-level History

2N Revolution and Dictatorship: Russia, 1917-1953
Report on the Examination

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Question 1

Most students engaged effectively with all three sources, although Source C proved to be the most demanding as the argument in the source is quite surprising given the provenance. Almost all students addressed both the provenance and content for all three sources, and the stronger responses also showed a good understanding of tone and the argument of each source. However, many students assessed provenance and content separately, an approach which did not always lend itself to achieving clear judgement about each source. The more analytical, and therefore more successful responses, often looked at the strengths of the sources in terms of both provenance and content, before balancing that with an assessment of weaknesses. Far fewer students this year provided a comparative conclusion assessing which source is the most valuable, which is pleasing as the question does not require this. Weaker students, however, still had a tendency to take a 'line-by-line' approach to each source and test each line for accuracy rather than focusing on the overall argument of the sources.

Source A

Stronger responses offered some balanced assessment in terms of provenance focusing on both the authorship and date of the source. These better responses also deployed some precise contextual knowledge in relation to the argument in the source. For example, there was some specific detail about the escalation of terror in the immediate aftermath of Kirov's murder, as well as effective supporting information about the 'bitterness and hostility' towards Stalin from within the party. To provide balance, several students argued that the turning point may not have been Kirov's murder but actually events of 1932 such as the Ryutin Affair and the suicide of Stalin's wife.

More limited responses tended to focus only on either the strengths or weaknesses of the provenance, and comments often lacked depth. Quite a few students did not read the attribution precisely and thought that the source was written by Bukharin in 1936. Less effective responses often had a tendency to get sidetracked by the circumstances of Kirov's death and whether Stalin was responsible for it or not. Source A does not claim that Stalin was responsible, so this line of analysis did not focus effectively on the argument in the source.

Source B

Again, stronger answers provided some balanced assessment of the provenance of Source B and there were also some thoughtful and effective comments about how the tone reflects the feelings of the people of the USSR during the Yezhovshchina. There was some precise supporting detail about NKVD arrest quotas and the momentum of terror at a local level. There was also some effective comment about the demands of Socialist Realism and how a poet such as Mandelstam would be under constant threat of arrest. Sometimes this was used to challenge the final sentence in the source that 'people are arrested for nothing'.

Weaker responses again tended to lack balance. Such students often looked at either the strengths of the provenance of the source, or the weaknesses. Supporting information in these more limited responses lacked precision. For example, there was some general comment about terror, such as the persecution of kulaks, which had some relevance to the source but the connection was weak. Other students used the show trials as evidence to support the source but this was less relevant and effective.

Source C

The better responses really got to grips with the argument of Source C that the show trial was impressive and clearly justified based on the evidence presented. Such students drew the inference that this demonstrates the power and effectiveness of Stalinist propaganda. This was often linked to the provenance of the source in that the US ambassador would be revealing his true thoughts to his daughter in a private letter but he would not be aware of the torture and threats made by the NKVD in order to secure these bogus confessions.

Weaker students often could not explain why an American observer would be writing a positive assessment of the show trial. The most common reason offered was that he himself felt threatened and his letter would be read by the NKVD, and therefore he had to write a positive assessment, otherwise he too would become a victim of the terror. Such a line of argument did not show an effective understanding of the provenance of the source. In terms of content, the more limited responses took refuge in assessing the factual statements of the source for accuracy, for example, they often highlighted the reference to the purge of the Red Army generals as being 'true' and therefore 'valuable'. Quite a few students also highlighted the phrase 'hostility to foreigners' as being accurate, however this often lacked focus on the question.

Question 2

This proved to be the hardest of the three essay questions as some students struggled to include a range of relevant content and, as a result, often added additional but irrelevant content on the weaknesses of the Provisional Government, which was not directed at the question. Some students included material from November and December 1917, which was credited if made relevant to the question, for example through arguing that the seizure of power was not complete with the storming of the Winter Palace, but required further consolidation through the creation of Sovnarkom and the issuing of a series of decrees.

The stronger responses showed a good knowledge of the events of 1917 and were able to accurately balance the roles of Lenin and Trotsky within that context. Most commonly, on Lenin, there was some effective explanation of his impact in April, through his 'April Theses', and then again in October, through his demands for an immediate revolution. Strong answers also offered some balance on Lenin, pointing out that he was in hiding for many weeks after the July Days and this limited the influence he had on events in Petrograd. On Trotsky, the strongest answers demonstrated good knowledge of his roles in the Petrograd Soviet and within the Military Revolutionary Committee, as well as in planning the actual seizure of power. There were also some references to Trotsky's role in choosing the date of the revolution to coincide with the Congress of Soviets towards the end of October. Balance on the role of Trotsky was achieved by many students through pointing out that he only joined the Bolsheviks in mid-1917. A common judgement derived from this was that Lenin is the more important as Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks due to Lenin's leadership.

Weaker answers struggled to include a sufficient range and depth of accurate factual content. There was occasionally some confusion between the February and October revolutions, but more generally details were thin and/or lacking in accuracy. Another common feature of weaker answers was to only address one aspect for each man. Therefore, there may have been some comment on Lenin's return in April but nothing more on the rest of 1917. Likewise, with Trotsky

there may have been some reference to his leadership of the MRC but hardly anything else on the actual seizure of power.

Question 3

This was by far the most popular of the three essay questions. The vast majority of marks awarded were in Levels 3 and 4 as most students showed an understanding of the question and provided relevant supporting information. The difference between a mark in Level 3 and one in Level 4 most often came down to the range and depth of factual evidence, as well as the degree of analysis precisely focused on the question.

Students in Levels 4 and 5 constructed analytical answers which directly addressed the question and which culminated in a judgement as to how significant unity and organisation were in relation to other factors. Responses in these two levels also provided specific supporting information such as details of the different groups and generals which made up the Whites. Such answers also provided a greater range of evidence covering, for example, war communism and propaganda in addition to the more obvious points about military organisation and Trotsky's leadership.

In Level 3, students tended to provide a survey of factors relevant to explaining the Reds' victory in the Civil War without focusing precisely and analytically on the question. Conclusions at this level tended to offer rather bland comments such as 'whilst unity and organisation were important factors in the Reds' victory in the Civil War, there were also other important factors such as.....' This approach did not achieve sufficient judgement for Level 4.

Question 4

This question elicited a wide range of different quality responses. There were some excellent answers which demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the varying consequences of collectivisation, both positive and negative. However, weaker answers had a tendency to focus too much on the aims of collectivisation without moving on to assess the outcomes associated with these aims. Generally, students were more comfortable discussing the political and ideological aspects of collectivisation but there was less depth and precision when considering the economic outcomes.

Stronger answers covered an impressive range of factors with effective analytical links to the question. Such responses compared the importance of the ideological 'victory' over the kulaks, the increasing political control of the Communist Party in the countryside, the social consequences such as famine, as well as the economic outcomes for both industry and agriculture. The latter points on the economic outcomes were most effective when students contrasted the damage done to livestock numbers and overall grain production (up to 1934) with the support provided for industrialisation, through increased grain procurement for urban workers and the increased export of grain to fund the Five Year Plans.

Weaker students struggled to separate aims and outcomes. Many argued that, as collectivisation aimed to modernise agriculture, this was therefore an important outcome, without really assessing how successful the policy was in achieving that aim. Many also asserted that because industry grew so rapidly in the 1930s, this must mean that collectivisation was a success, without explaining how collectivisation contributed to the industrial growth. Understanding of the difference between grain production and grain procurement was weak in Levels 2 and 3.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.